

September 22, 1999

**Africa, Chile, China... Next Outer Mongolia?**

**Three Trips, Eight Countries, 2,400 People  
— and a \$60 Million Pentagon Tab**

Any viewer of the evening news could easily see that President Clinton sharply increased his travels out of town last year. But only now has the cost and scale of some of these trips been calculated. In the course of just three of his out-of-country excursions during 1998, President Clinton spent \$72.1 million of the taxpayers' money to bring 2,401 people with him to eight countries (six in Africa plus Chile and China), report General Accounting Office (GAO) accountants after a one-year investigation.

These 2,401 people plus the President and lots of equipment and supplies were carried to and fro during the course of 297 Air Force missions, many of which involved several flights, often by gigantic C-5 cargo aircraft or by specialized military VIP jets, says the GAO in its draft study, "Presidential Travel: Costs and Accounting for the President's 1998 Trips to Africa, Chile, and China," provided to the Senators who last year requested it. (Note that the GAO used the term "mission" as a flight or flights on a military plane that included one or more flight segments, such as a round-trip flight to a foreign destination and a return flight to home base, or as a flight plan that included multiple flight segments.)

The defense budget paid for **84 percent**, or \$60.5 million, of the total cost of these trips, specifically from the Operation and Maintenance account (which pays for the day-to-day operations of our military forces, including equipment maintenance and support, purchase of spare parts, and training), and from the Transportation Working Capital Fund.

The GAO study relied upon data provided by the Pentagon and only includes the incremental cost of each trip, ignoring, for example, routine military payroll. In addition, the report only analyzes three overseas trips — the President traveled to nine other countries in 1998 alone.

Because of the President's travels throughout Africa, the Air Force was forced to cancel or refuse 26 air missions that it would have flown in its regular duties, and postponed 30 others, according to a press report [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1/10/99].

Normally, the Air Force's cargo aircraft are used to ferry Army, Navy, and Air Force troops and supplies around the world. It's a small wonder there is some resentment and bitterness over what some considered a wasteful use of military aircraft and crews to transport

unneeded people and excess baggage, as reflected in this statement by one Air Force officer: "It's excessive. And there's no accountability." [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1/10/99].

## **Slashing the Pentagon's Budget, While Spending it on Himself**

While President Clinton has been spending defense dollars for his own travels, he has slashed the Pentagon's budget every year he has been in office. When he became President, the defense budget was some \$300 billion. By 1997, that number had fallen to \$254 billion (or \$224.7 billion, holding inflation constant), an incredible 25-percent drop in real economic terms, and this in an era where federal spending otherwise grew by some 16 percent.

This year, the President promised to increase defense spending by \$110 billion over six years, with a \$12 billion bump-up in 1999 alone. Even this figure falls far short of the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) who, in 1998 (as Clinton and his entourage racked up over 5,400 air hours on three trips), testified as to a need for \$148 billion over six years, with an increase of \$17.5 billion this year alone. And their \$17.5 billion requirement excluded the \$2.5 billion needed for pay raises and enhanced benefits, bringing the total 1999 requirement to \$20 billion. Overall, the President's defense spending plan was at least \$40.5 billion less over six years — and \$8 billion less in 1999 — than the levels outlined by the Joint Chiefs in 1998.

During his presidency, Clinton has used U.S. forces abroad 45 times. Even now, at least 200 U.S. troops are bound for East Timor. These deployments are in addition to the 6,900 U.S. troops in Bosnia, 7,000 troops in Kosovo, and some 20,000 troops — mostly sailors and Marines — involved in Southwest Asia around Iraq, enforcing maritime sanctions in the Arabian Sea and two no-fly zones over Iraq. These operations have strained U.S. troop readiness and quality of life: operational tempo (OPTEMPO — the work pace for maintenance, repairs and combat training) has increased, keeping soldiers away from their families for long periods of time, equipment is being cannibalized, and training is suffering.

None of this bothers this President — whose upcoming travel plans may include Antarctica. His staff later acknowledged such a trip would impose significant "logistical problems" (that is, that the lack of infrastructure in Antarctica would create even greater — and more costly — logistical requirements than those posed by the trip to Africa). This has not deterred President Clinton; press reports claim he is still considering an Antarctica escape. He has also voiced a desire to see Vietnam — despite his refusal to accept a previous Air Force offer to fly him there for free some 30 years ago.

## **How Do These Trips Stack Up?...**

The data provided by the GAO report, which estimates the costs of President Clinton's 1998 trips to Africa, Chile and China, allows for some interesting comparisons:

- The accounting system used by the Pentagon to estimate flight costs gives the President the same rate as that charged for sending soldiers sent to Bosnia, Haiti, and East Timor.

According to press reports, the Pentagon usually charges non-defense customers roughly 33 percent extra. [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1/10/99]

- Under these less generous calculations, airlift for Clinton's trips to China, Africa, and Chile would have cost roughly \$70 million, bringing the Pentagon's total cost to approximately \$77 million. Adding back in the non-defense costs of the trips, the grand total of taxpayers money spent on the three trips would reach just over \$90 million.
- Clinton also traveled to nine other countries in 1998 alone (since 1993, he's visited 59 different countries, many of them more than one time), but the cost of those trips has not been calculated.
- The total cost to the Pentagon of the President's three trips — \$60.5 million — could buy some 3,000 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) smart bombs. These are the bombs the U.S. used so widely, and ran low on, during the war in Kosovo.
- 904 members of the Pentagon accompanied the President to Africa, a number equivalent to one U.S. Army battalion.
- While one of the objectives of the President's trip to Africa was "to promote U.S. investment, trade, and economic growth" in that country, the Commerce and Treasury Departments only sent three people each, while the Treasury and U.S. Trade Representative each were represented by only one person. Meanwhile, the White House brought along over 200 people and the U.S. Information Agency brought over 100 travelers.

### **And, How Was The Military Used?**

- The number of missions flown (excluding helicopter missions): Africa — 148; Chile — 36; China — 47.
- The number of military flight hours for each trip: Africa — 3,508; Chile — 716; China — 1,017.
- 5 different types of passenger aircraft; 4 different types of strategic-lift aircraft; and 2 different types of aerial refueling aircraft were flown.
- 5 different types of helicopters were used to support the Africa trip; 2 different types of helicopters were used for the Chile trip.

---

Staff contact: Dr. Yvonne Bartoli, 224-2946